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ABSTRACT

A training program which has been operating in Virginia Beach City Public Schools since 1980 provides services to disadvantaged and handicapped students ranging in age from 14 to 22 years. Each student participates on an individualized basis in academic and vocational activities, with rehabilitation counseling support, to develop appropriate work habits and behaviors. Students who are successful in meeting their work adjustment goals may exit this program and enter vocational training or competitive employment outside the schools. The staffing pattern includes a part-time coordinator, a full-time work adjustment specialist, a work adjustment vocational instructor, and a work adjustment academic instructor. Followup services are conducted after students leave the program. (Author/CL)

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WORK ADJUSTMENT TRAINING

A WORKING MODEL

IN THE

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF A MODEL WORK ADJUSTMENT TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH HAS BEEN OPERATING IN VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS SINCE 1980. TYPICALLY, WORK ADJUSTMENT SERVICES HAVE BEEN OFFERED THROUGH REHABILITATION PROGRAMS OR SHELTERED WORKSHOPS. THIS INNOVATIVE PROGRAM OPERATES IN A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL SETTING. SERVICES ARE PROVIDED TO DISADVANTAGED AND HANDICAPPED STUDENTS RANGING IN AGE FROM 14 TO 22 YEARS. EACH STUDENT PARTICIPATES ON AN INDIVIDUALIZED BASIS IN ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, WITH REHABILITATION COUNSELING SUPPORT, IN ORDER TO DEVELOP APPROPRIATE WORK HABITS AND BEHAVIORS. STUDENTS WHO ARE SUCCESSFUL IN MEETING THEIR WORK ADJUSTMENT GOALS MAY EXIT THIS PROGRAM AND ENTER VOCATIONAL TRAINING OR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS.

WORK ADJUSTMENT TRAINING - A WORKING MODEL IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

With the trend to make more vocational training services available to special needs students previously excluded due to the severity of their handicapping conditions, the need to either adequately prepare these students for existing courses and/or modify the targeted programs increases proportionately. The Virginia Beach City Public Schools decided to concentrate its efforts in preparing these special needs students by providing Work Adjustment Training services. Now in its fifth year of operation, the Work Adjustment Training program has provided short term (less than one semester) services to over 350 students. All of these students were identified as being inappropriate for admission to a vocational training course by vocational evaluators, vocational instructors, guidance counselors, or administrators prior to enrollment in Work Adjustment Training.

NEED/PURPOSE

Vocational education, in a highly structured and specialized setting, has been available in Virginia Beach City Public Schools since 1960. However, problems became evident with the regular technical education setting for some students during the 1970's. Some internal studies were conducted which indicated that many students were being inappropriately placed in programs at the vocational technical center, based on their level of academic achievement or upon some handicapping condition. In addition, 1900 handicapped and disadvantaged students were identified who were not receiving vocational education services, but who could benefit from vocational education. In 1978 vocational evaluation was integrated into the public school system. This allowed further identification of students with behavioral or academic deficits which would be prohibitive to their completion of vocational training. In addition, students began to remain in the public school system for longer periods of time as a result of Public Law 94-142. Students who had previously left school at the age of 15 or 17 and sought services through the Department of Rehabilitative Services were remaining in the public school system until they were 20 or 21.

It was also indicated through internal studies that special education students were not being allowed total access to vocational education programs as a result of their inability to participate in a standardized curriculum. Resource teachers were not available in the regular vocational school setting, and as a result students with special needs were typically less successful in their chosen vocational area.

A program was envisioned which would help students develop a body of knowledge regarding job requirements, appropriate work behaviors, job-seeking and job-keeping skills, as well as some social adjustment. There was some indication that students with limited vocational exposure could enter the proposed program to become familiar with requirements of a vocational or shop setting.

GOALS

The Virginia Beach City Public Schools Work Adjustment Training program was funded, staffed, and began operation in August, 1980. The goals as established are to teach appropriate work habits, behaviors, and pre-vocational skills as a

means of preparation for students who may be entering vocational training at the Vocational Technical Center or the Career Development Center, or going directly into competitive employment. In addition, trade-related pre-vocational academic skills are offered as part of each student's daily program.

Objective documentation is developed on each student related to individual work habits and work behaviors. The staff coordinates this information with observations made by a student's special education teacher in order to further develop an appropriate individual educational plan (IEP). The final goal of the Work Adjustment Training program is to provide follow-up services for students who have completed Work Adjustment and entered employment or vocational training, in order to assure a generalization of work habits and behaviors which had been learned.

STAFFING

The staffing pattern for the Work Adjustment Training program includes a part-time coordinator, a full time (11 month) work adjustment specialist, a work adjustment vocational instructor and a work adjustment academic instructor. In addition, a full-time secretary is assigned to the unit and part-time services are available from an aide assigned to the vocational evaluation unit. The coordinator of Work Adjustment services also works with vocational evaluation and other related services for special needs students. Approximately 1/4 of his time is devoted to scheduling and the coordination of transportation for students who will be entering Work Adjustment Training.

The work adjustment specialist serves the primary function of developing the individual work adjustment training plan for each student, monitoring daily progress toward the attainment of individual behavioral goals, and coordinating the exit of students from Work Adjustment as they indicate a readiness for either vocational training or competitive employment. The work adjustment specialist for Virginia Beach was hired on the basis of previous rehabilitation experience.

The Work Adjustment program, which operates on a 3 class-period schedule, is primarily bent toward vocational exposure. For this reason, a work adjustment vocational instructor was required. Although the person filling this position is certified in industrial arts, his primary qualifications included a background in working with handicapped and disadvantaged students, as well as a willingness to learn work adjustment and rehabilitation techniques. The vocational instructor in Work Adjustment operates without a curriculum in providing vocational experiences in an environment of real work for students with various handicapping conditions.

The work adjustment academic instructor also was hired on the basis of previous rehabilitation and school experience. Each student's academic work is individualized and is related to his projected vocational goal (as indicated by his vocational evaluation). Because the program is so highly individualized, the academic instructor is required to constantly monitor each student's progress, and may be required to teach different skills to as many as 12 students at a time.

EQUIPPING THE PROGRAM

The physical plant provided by the Virginia Beach City Public Schools for the Work Adjustment program is more than sufficient. The plan includes a conference

room, a classroom, an office with telephone facilities, a large shop area (approximately 3500 square feet), a paint booth, two storage areas, and two bathrooms.

More academically-related materials and instructional supplies were required for the set up for the work adjustment classroom than for a typical special education class as a result of the wide range of student needs which would be served. Six tape recorders and filmstrip projectors were purchased along with headphones. This allows each student to have visual and auditory materials to accompany each lesson.

An initial $5000 grant was received for the purchase of shop equipment and workbenches. Work Adjustment staff members solicited donations from area utility companies and received used desks, furniture, clocks, workbenches, and sofas for a student break area.

In addition, prime-manufactured products from Work Adjustment have been sold to teachers or the general public. The program has returned approximately $6000 over a period of 3 years to the program for the purchase of additional training equipment and supplies. Currently the program operates on an annual budget of $6400 for instructional materials and supplies, plus the cost of staff salaries and benefits.

PROGRAM OPERATING PROCEDURES

Students referred to the Career Development Center initially enter the vocational evaluation unit. Vocational evaluators make a determination as to a need for Work Adjustment Training services. If it is determined that a student must enter Work Adjustment, the documentation and behavioral observations are forwarded to the Work Adjustment staff. During intake in Work Adjustment, students receive an orientation to the program, the classroom, and the shop. They receive written copies of rules pertaining to Work Adjustment and are informed as to classroom procedures. A videotaped orientation is available for students, as well.

The initial 5 days for each student in Work Adjustment serves as the baseline observation period. During this time little effort is made to modify any work habits or behaviors. In fact, the first week in Work Adjustment usually serves as an extention of observations made by vocational evaluators. At the end of the 5 day baseline period, target behaviors are established and an Individual Work Adjustment Plan (IWAP) is developed with the student. The student participates in the development of his IWAP and signs the plan indicating that he is in agreement and that he understands the reasoning behind it.

Each student is in the classroom portion of Work Adjustment for 55 minutes each day and in the laboratory setting for the remaining 2 class periods. Counseling services are always available and may be scheduled for each student at least twice a week. In addition, the work adjustment specialist will counsel a student individually whenever difficulties arise in the shop or classroom setting, rather than dealing with the situation in a disciplinary manner as has been typical in the school setting.

The team-teaching approach is used throughout the Work Adjustment Training program. Daily staffings are held in which each student's progress is discussed. A team approach is taken in selecting which behaviors will be targeted for initial change and a priority system is established for each student's behaviors. A review of available behavioral, academic, psychological and medical information allows the staff to select appropriate jobs for the student in the vocational part of the program.

Once a student has demonstrated completion of his behavioral goals and has maintained those behaviors for 1 week, then plans are made for him to exit Work Adjustment and go on to his vocational goal. If the goal is further vocational training, then arrangments are made for a schedule change and for any necessary changes in transportation. If the goal is competitive employment, then the student is referred to the employment counseling and placement services office of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools for assistance in locating a job. Coordination is also provided for students who are going into sheltered workshop employment.

Occasionally students require services other than those available in the public school system. The Work Adjustment staff coordinates their efforts with other community service agencies including the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services Board, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and the Virginia Employment Commission.

When the student leaves Work Adjustment to enter vocational training or employment, follow-up services are conducted for a period of 3 weeks. During the follow-up, a verbal contact is made with the student's instructor or employer on a daily basis. In addition, written follow-up reports are provided by the instructor on each student at the end of each week. If the student is encountering difficulties on the job or in vocational training, then additional counseling or other related services will be provided by the Work Adjustment staff. Occasionally, a student will encounter so many difficulties in vocational training that it will be necessary for him to return to Work Adjustment for additional training.

EVALUATION

The Work Adjustment staff has developed a procedure for the provision of annual reports to the administration. A compilation of the annual reports for the past 5 years indicates that an average of 100 students are served per year in the Work Adjustment Training unit. The average length of stay for each student is between 6 and 9 weeks. Of the students served, approximately 65% are prepared to go directly into vocational training or employment. Another 10% of students are placed in academic classes only, but they may chose to again pursue vocational training at a later time. Of the remaining 25%, approximately 2% are students who indicate through their lack of effort that they are unable to make the necessary changes in order to succeed in vocational training. Some students return for services during a subsequent school year and almost all of these students meet with success upon their return to Work Adjustment. Some students are referred directly for employment or for other related services such as placement in a sheltered workshop or a work-activities center.

A program evaluation will be completed during the 5th year of operation (1985). The program evaluation is currently in process and should provide some indication of program effectiveness and efficiency. The program evaluation will include surveys of students who have been in Work Adjustment, special education teachers whose students have been referred for Work Adjustment Training services, vocational evaluators, and vocational teachers who have received students after their Work Adjustment Training was completed. Results of the program evaluation may indicate needs for change in emphasis, which will then be instituted into the program.